

Message Text

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TO SECSTATE WASHDC IMMEDIATE 6377

INFO AMEMBASSY AMMAN

AMEMBASSY BEIRUT

AMEMBASSY CAIRO

AMEMBASSY DAMASCUS

AMCONSUL JERUSALEM

AMEMBASSY LONDON

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USMISSION NATO

C O N F I D E N T I A L TEL AVIV 2394

E.O. 11652: GDS

TAGS: PFOR, US, IS, XF

SUBJ: IMPACT OF SEA DEVELOPMENTS ON ISRAEL

1. SUMMARY: ISRAELIS RELATE RECENT DEVELOPMENTS IN SOUTH-EAST ASIA TO THEIR OWN SITUATION IN HOSTILE MIDDLE EAST REGION AND TEND TO CONSIDER THEM PRINCIPALLY IN CONTEXT OF THEIR OWN RELATIONSHIP WITH US. PRIMARY RESULT THUS FAR HAS BEEN TO RAISE QUESTIONS IN ISRAELI MINDS ABOUT VALIDITY OF US COMMITMENTS, PARTICULARLY IN CONNECTION WITH NEXT STEPS IN NEGOTIATIONS, AND TO REINFORCE ISRAELI CONVICTION THAT GOI DECISIONS DURING RECENT NEGOTIATIONS WERE CORRECT ONES. WE HEAR VARIATIONS ON THESE THEMES IN VIRTUALLY ALL OF OUR CONTACTS WITH ISRAELIS AND THEY ARE PRIME SUBJECT OF PRESS COMMENTARY. END SUMMARY.
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2. ISRAELIS INEVITABLY HAVE PAID CLOSE ATTENTION TO EVENTS IN SOUTHEAST ASIA OF LAST SEVERAL WEEKS, AND NOT UNEXPECTEDLY HAVE BEEN ANALYZING THEIR IMPLICATIONS FOR MIDDLE EAST. INITIAL ISRAELI REACTION WAS TO SEE DEVELOPMENTS AS

JUSTIFYING THEIR DECISIONS IN RECENT SHUTTLE NEGOTIATIONS. BUT WITH FALL OF PHNOM PENH AND RESIGNATION OF THIEU GOVERNMENT ISRAELI CONCERN HAS WIDENED TO INCLUDE SERIOUS PUBLIC QUESTIONING ABOUT VALIDITY OF NEGOTIATED AGREEMENTS AND THE VALUE OF US COMMITMENTS. IT IS IMPOSSIBLE TO HAVE PRIVATE OR OFFICIAL DISCUSSION IN ISRAEL TODAY ABOUT MIDDLE EAST DEVELOPMENTS AND PROSPECTS WITHOUT REFERENCE TO RECENT HISTORY IN SOUTHEAST ASIA.

3. IN GENERAL TERMS, CAMBODIA AND SOUTH VIETNAM DEVELOPMENTS HAVE REINFORCED EXISTING PESSIMISTIC ISRAELI ATTITUDES ABOUT POSSIBILITY OF ACHIEVING STABLE AND BINDING SETTLEMENTS WITH ARAB STATES. THEY HAVE ALSO CALLED INTO QUESTION VALUE OF COMMITMENTS AND/OR PROMISES MADE BY THIRD PARTIES, WHETHER THEY BE INTERNATIONAL ORGANIZATIONS OR THE UNITED STATES.

4. CONSIDERABLE ATTENTION HAS FOCUSED ON VALUE OF US COMMITMENTS. ISRAELIS ATTACH GREAT IMPORTANCE TO CLOSE US/ISRAELI RELATIONSHIP, PARTICULARLY CONTINUING MILITARY AND FINANCIAL SUPPORT. BUT ISRAELIS ARE ASKING QUESTIONS ABOUT US ROLE AS MEDIATOR IN INTERNATIONAL DISPUTE. THIS QUESTIONING FOCUSES HEAVILY ON VALUE AND DURABILITY OF AGREEMENTS NEGOTIATED BY SECRETARY, AND OF PROMISES MADE EITHER ORALLY OR IN WRITING TO ONE OF PARTIES ON BEHALF OF THE OTHER. IN ADDITION, HAVING NOTED CHANGING CONGRESSIONAL ATTITUDES TO SOUTHEAST ASIA, ISRAELIS ARE ASKING WHAT GUARANTEE THERE WOULD BE THAT COMMITMENTS ENTERED INTO WITH CONSENT OF A PARTICULAR CONGRESS RE MIDDLE EAST WOULD REMAIN BINDING UNDER SUBSEQUENT ADMINISTRATIONS AND CONGRESSES. ISRAELIS ALSO NOTE THAT EXECUTIVE BRANCH NO LONGER CAN AUTOMATICALLY ASSUME CONGRESSIONAL SUPPORT FOR COMMITMENTS OR PROMISES REGARDING FUTURE MILITARY AND/OR FINANCIAL ASSISTANCE.

5. RELATING SOUTHEAST ASIA EVENTS SPECIFICALLY TO RECENT MIDEAST DEVELOPMENTS, ISRAELIS IN GENERAL VIEW THEM AS BUT-CONFIDENTIAL

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TRESSING AND SUPPORTING CORRECTNESS OF GOI DECISION IN RECENTLY SUSPENDED EGYPTIAN-ISRAELI NEGOTIATIONS FOR INTERIM SETTLEMENT. IN SCORES OF CONVERSATIONS, WE HAVE HEARD ISRAELIS EMPHASIZE THAT SEA DEVELOPMENTS REINFORCE THE CORRECTNESS OF THE PRINCIPLE OF NATIONAL SELF-RELIANCE, WITH EMPHASIS ON HOLDING ON TO STRATEGIC POSITIONS IN ABSENCE OF BINDING PEACE AGREEMENTS. ISRAELIS ARE NOW MORE THAN EVER CONVINCED THAT IT WOULD BE EXTREMELY UNWISE AND RISKY TO RELY ON EXTERNAL INTERVENTION OR INTERNATIONAL GUARANTEES AS SUBSTITUTE FOR EFFECTIVE NATIONAL MEANS OF SELF-DEFENSE.

6. SEVERAL ISRAELI COMMENTATORS HAVE ARGUED THAT ONE CONSEQUENCE OF SOUTHEAST ASIAN EVENTS IN WASHINGTON WILL BE TO TAKE STEAM OUT OF ALLEGED ADMINISTRATION EFFORTS IN MIDEAST POLICY REASSESSMENT

TO PRESSURE ISRAEL FOR GREATER FLECIBILITY VIS-A-VIS EGYPTIANS. THEIR ARGUMENTATION IS THAT POLITICALLY WEAKENED US ADMINISTRATION NO LONGER WILL HAVE CLOUT TO LEAN ON ISRAEL, AND THAT REASSESSMENT THERFORE WILL NLEAD TO NO SIGNIFICANT CHANGE IN US POLICY TO ISRAEL. OPERATIVE CONCLUSION OBVIOUSLY IS THAT ISRAEL SHOULD HOLD FIRMLY TO ITS ESTABLISHED POSITIONS.

7. MFA OFFICIAL HAS ALSO CALLED OUR ATTENTION TO ISRAELI CONCERN FOR IMPLICATION OF SOUTHEAST ASIAN EVENTS ON ARAB PERCEPTIONS. AS THIS OFFICIAL SAW IT, ARABS MIGHT DRAW CONCLUSION THAT US COMMITMENT TO ITS ALLIES (INCLUDING ISRAEL) WAS NO LONGER CREDIBLE. ARABS COULD DRAW DANGEROUS CONCLUSIONS ABOUT POTENTIAL VULNERABILITY OF ISRAEL.

8. WHILE USING SEA DEVELOPMENTS TO STRENGTHEN ISRAELI NEGOTIATING POSITIONS, WE BELIEVE MOST ISRAELIS ALSO ARE AWARE OF LIMITS TO COMPARISON BETWEEN SOUTHEAST ASIA AND MIDDLE EAST. MOST BELIEVE THAT MIDDLE EAST IS OF MUCH GREATER IMPORTANCE TO US THAN VIETNAM OR CAMBODIA. THEY ALSO ARE AWARE THAT ISRAEL FOR NUMBER OF WELL-KNOWN REASONS ENJOYS FAR GREATER CONGRESSINAL AND PUBLIC SUPPORT THAN SOUTHEAST ASIAN NATIONS. IN ADDITION, NOTING COMMENTS OF INTERNATIONAL MEDIA RE CORRUPTION AND LACK OF POPULAR SUPPORT FOR THIEU AND LON NOL REGIMES, ISRAELIS TAKE PRIDE IN CONTRASTING CONFIDENTIAL

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THESE REGIMES WITH STABILITY AND DEMOCRATIC STRUCTURE OF ISRAEL. MOREOVER, ISRAELIS NOTE THAT THEIR SUPPORT REQUIREMENTS--AS SEEN FROM HERE--ARE MINISCULE AS COMPARED TO AMOUNTS USG INVESTED IN SUPPORT OF CAMBODIA AND VIETNAM. THE ARGUMENT IS INVARIABLY MADE THAT ISRAEL HAS NEVER ASKED FOR US TROOP INTERVENTION.

9. IN SUM, WHILE IMPACT OF SOUTHEAST ASIA EVENTS WILL DOUBTLESS RECEDE SOMEWHAT AS OTHER DEVELOPMENTS IMPINGE ON PUBLIC CONSCIOUSNESS, THEY HAVE DARKENED ALREADY GLOOMY PROGNOSTICATIONS ABOUT PROSPECTS FOR SIGNIFICANT PROGRESS TOWARDS ATTAINING NEGOTIATED SETTLEMENT OF ARAB-ISRAELI DISPUTE. TO EXTENT ISRAELIS BELIEVE THAT ARABS ARE NEITHER PREPARED TO ACCEPT LEGITIMACY OF JEWISH STATE NOR INTERESTED IN REACHING GENUINE POLITICAL ACCOMMODATION, THEY WILL REMAIN SKEPTICAL ABOUT VALUE OF ARAB POLITICAL COMMITMENTS IN NEGOTIATED SETTLEMENTS--PARTICULARLY IF THEY ARE MADE THROUGH THIRD PARTIES. ISRAELIS ALSO WILL BE WATCHING CLOSELY ONGOING EXECUTIVE/LEGISLATIVE BRANCH TUSSLE IN US OVER FOREIGN POLICY ISSUES AS WELL AS INTERNATIONAL MEDIA HANDLING OF ISSUE OF USG'S CREDIBILITY AND EFFECTIVENESS.

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